

**A GUIDE
TO CONDUCTING
VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROJECTS
IN THE
PACIFIC NORTHWEST REGION**

**USDA FOREST SERVICE
FOREST PEST MANAGEMENT
PACIFIC NORTHWEST REGION**



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Introduction

This is a guide for implementing new Regional direction for vegetation management. It summarizes information contained in the Record of Decision (ROD) as amended in March, 1992, and in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation (FEIS), which was published in December, 1988.

The parties to the lawsuit over the use of herbicides in the region agreed to supplement the FEIS with a Mediated Agreement. That legal accord clarifies and expands on some implementation direction from the FEIS and Record of Decision.

The Vegetation Management FEIS, its Record of Decision, numerous appendices, and the Mediated Agreement are lengthy and complicated documents. This Guide summarizes the most relevant direction for planning and performing vegetation management. It explains some important new concepts and includes examples of situations you may encounter.

What Has Been Decided, and What You Must Decide

To use this Guide effectively, it is important to understand which decisions were made in the FEIS and which remain to be made by you at the project level.

Projects that fall within the scope of the FEIS include vegetation management for:

- **site preparation,**
- **conifer release,**
- **fire management activities,**
- **range improvements,**
- **noxious weed control,**
- **wildlife habitat improvement,**
- **recreation and facilities maintenance,**
- **roadside and corridor maintenance**
- **tree genetic improvement programs, and**
- **research.**

Activities in National Forest nurseries are excluded, as is prescribed burning when its sole purpose is to reduce the risk of wildfire. Provisions of the FEIS also do not apply to pre-commercial and commercial thinning.

Vegetation management activities can be part of larger projects which include a variety of actions and tasks. Decisions in the FEIS pertain only to activities related to the promotion of desired relationships between elements of woodland vegetation.

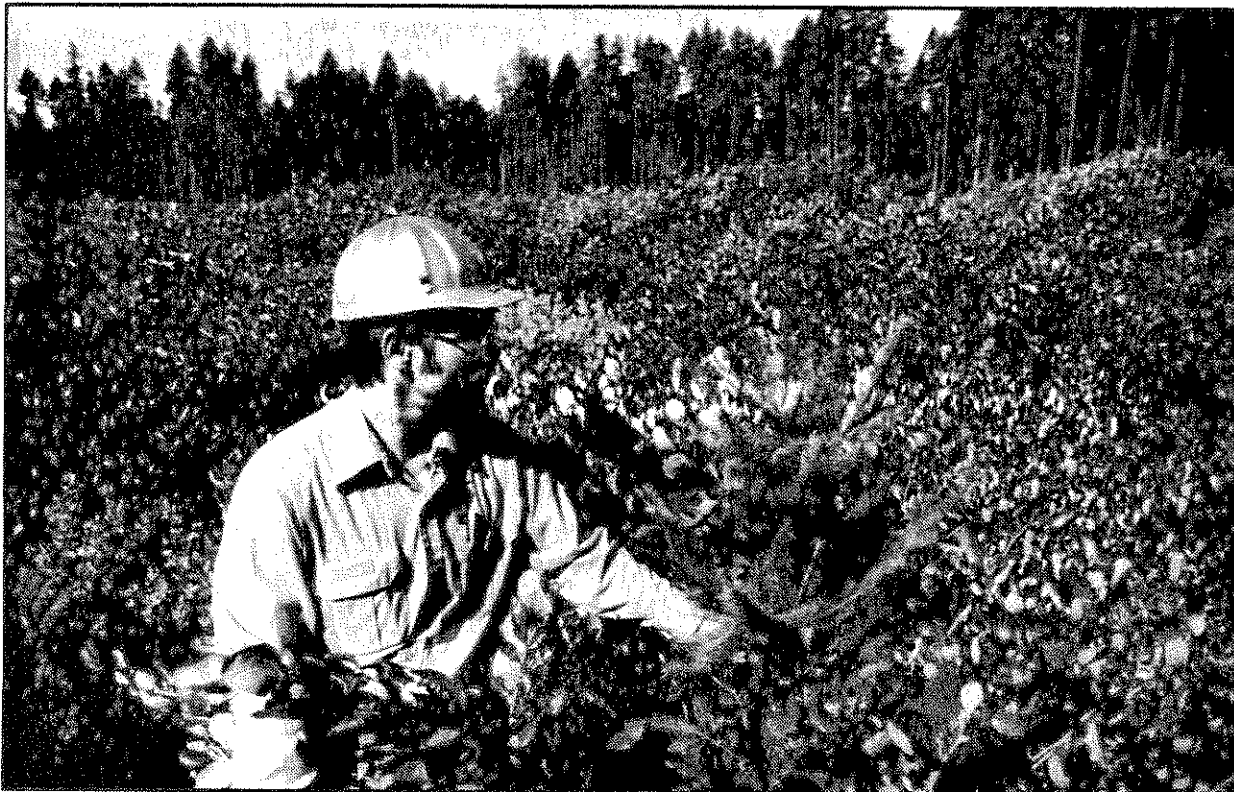
The objectives, processes, and tools permitted for projects throughout the Region are given on pages 3-6 of the Record of Decision. Required mitigation measures are discussed on pages 17-21 of the ROD, and on pages 2-4 of the amended ROD. Information about how Regional issues were addressed is found on pages 13-14 of the ROD. Local conditions must be taken into account in applying FEIS directions in site-specific project planning. They include social and economic

conditions as well as the physical and biological environment.

Prevention of situations that require direct control of undesirable vegetation is the primary emphasis of the Record of Decision and the FEIS. The concept of "prevention" was more strictly defined in the Mediated Agreement:

"Prevention means to detect and ameliorate the conditions that cause or favor the presence of competing or unwanted vegetation in the forests.

"Prevention is in contrast to treatment, which refers to activities for controlling or eradicating infestations of competing or unwanted vegetation. It also should not be confused with early treatment, which refers to activities for controlling or eradicating initial, small infestations of competing or unwanted vegetation before they



interfere with the agency's objectives for managing that area or adjacent lands."

When management objectives cannot be achieved by prevention, a prescribed process of site-specific planning must be performed. The public must be informed and involved at the outset of this planning and throughout the process of implementation and monitoring.

Five methods of vegetation treatment are available for use:

- **biological**
- **manual**
- **mechanical**
- **prescribed fire**
- **herbicides.**

A number of requirements must be satisfied, however, before any treatment can be selected for a project. Prevention strategies must always be considered. If treatment is needed, this question must be asked: "How will the treatment lead toward a long-term prevention strategy?" The required mitigation measures for herbicides must be feasible.

Relationship to Existing Project Plans

The interrelationships of the Record of Decision to projects that are in some stage of the National Environmental Policy Act planning process, or awaiting action are discussed in Chapter I of the Guide. These relationships have a bearing on timber sales currently being prepared in response to Section 318 legislation. In brief, if a project NEPA decision was not made before the signing of the

Record of Decision for this FEIS, then the provisions of the ROD apply and must be analyzed. If a project NEPA decision was previously made, the legal "reopening" of the decision is not required. Such actions, however, should be reviewed for compatibility with the ROD.

Relationship to Forest Plans

Chapter I of the FEIS declares:

"This EIS looks at those vegetation management projects collectively as a program, and analyzes and discloses their environmental impacts. In addition, it presents their implications for the cost and amount of work needed to manage the Forests.

"Analysis and choices made in the Forest planning process are based on detailed data and familiarity with local conditions. While this EIS does display the Regionwide management implications of the alternatives, it does not specifically change any allocation or expected output level in the Forest Plans.

"Decisions based on this EIS could affect the Forest Plans. Forest Plans were developed using the assumption that all methods of managing vegetation are still, at least in theory, available."

Contents of the Guide

The first chapter contains instruction for conducting site-specific environmental analysis of vegetation management projects. Project scoping, data collection, selecting a strategy and combining it

with the Environmental Assessment process and estimating direct and cumulative effects are discussed.

Stressed throughout the FEIS and Mediated Agreement is the need for public information and involvement. Chapter II of this Guide suggests methods for gaining public acceptance of your vegetation management program.

Next, the Guide discusses how to prepare a human health risk management plan for a project. The elements of risk management, health monitoring and reporting procedures, and the relationship of employee civil rights to mitigation measures for health protection are described in Chapter III.

Suggested methods for working with cooperators to comply with FEIS requirements are presented in Chapter IV.

Chapter V on monitoring discusses how project results and effects will be tracked, and how to use this tracking to improve future projects.

This is followed in Chapter VI by Information Profiles describing each method, and each individual herbicide available for project use. These profiles include information on the correct use and the potential environmental and human health effects of each substance. The profiles are being prepared by the Regional Office and will be sent to you as they are completed. No herbicide may be used in the PNW Region unless the Region has published a profile on it.

References to relevant portions of the FEIS and Mediated Agreement are given throughout the Guide. Appendix A to the Mediated Agreement, which includes its provisions and definitions, is included in the Appendices.